

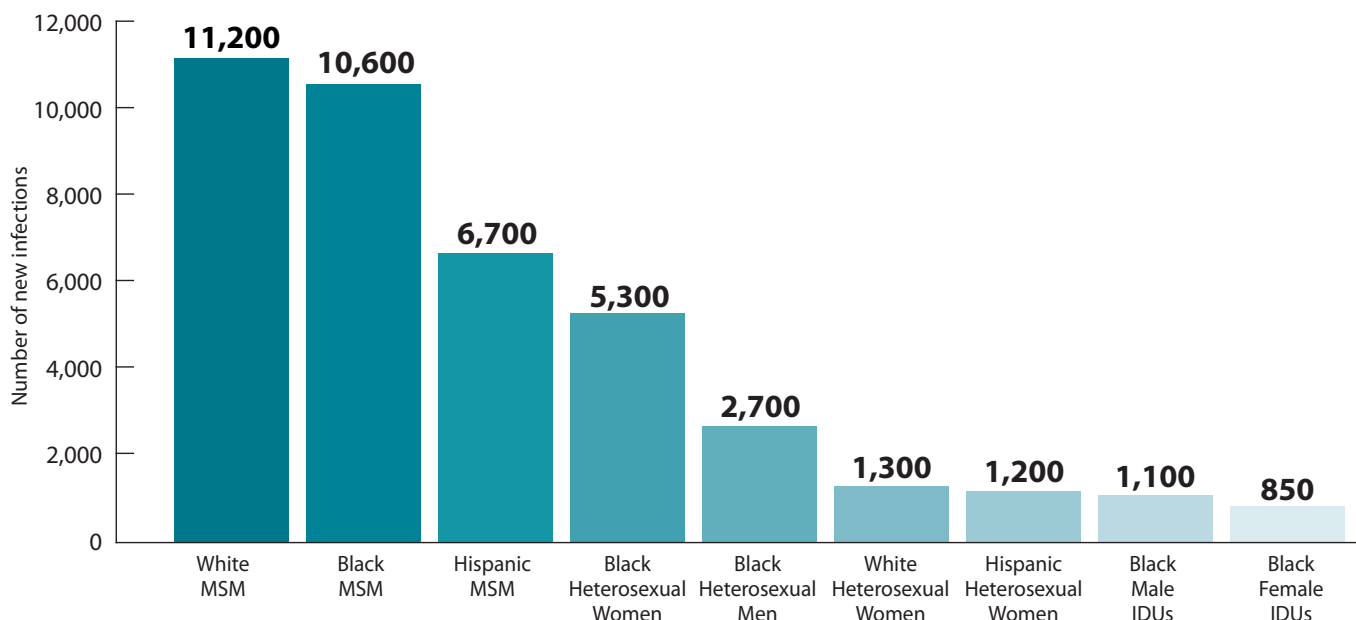
HIV and AIDS among Gay and Bisexual Men

Gay and bisexual men — referred to in CDC surveillance systems as men who have sex with men (MSM)¹ — of all races continue to be the risk group most severely affected by HIV. CDC's most recent data show that between 2008 and 2010, the number of new infections among MSM increased 12 percent, with an even steeper increase among the youngest MSM. These data clearly show the urgent need to expand access to proven HIV prevention programs for gay and bisexual men, and to develop new approaches to fight HIV in this population.

A Snapshot

- MSM account for approximately half of the 1.1 million people living with HIV in the United States (52%, or an estimated 592,100 persons) and more than half of all new HIV infections each year (63%, or an estimated 29,800 infections).
- Comparing 2008 to 2010, there was a 12 percent increase in the number of new infections among MSM. Among the youngest MSM — those aged 13–24 — new infections increased 22 percent, from 7,200 infections in 2008 to 8,800 in 2010.
- While CDC estimates that only 4 percent of men in the United States are MSM, the rate of new HIV diagnoses among MSM in the United States is more than 44 times that of other men (range: 522–989 per 100,000 MSM vs. 12 per 100,000 other men).²
- White MSM continue to represent the largest number of new HIV infections among MSM (11,200), followed closely by black MSM (10,600) and Hispanic MSM (6,700).

Figure 1. Estimated New HIV Infections in the United States, 2010, for the Most-Affected Subpopulations



¹ The term men who have sex with men is used in CDC surveillance systems because it indicates the behaviors that transmit HIV infection, rather than how individuals self-identify in terms of their sexuality.

² Purcell D et al. Estimating the population size of men who have sex with men in the United States to obtain HIV and syphilis rates. *The Open AIDS Journal* 2012; 6(Suppl 1: M6): 114–123.



- Young, black MSM are severely affected and now account for more new infections in the United States (4,800 in 2010) than any other subgroup by race/ethnicity, age, and sex.
- In a study of 20 major U.S. cities in 2011, MSM had high levels of HIV infection, and many of those infected with HIV did not know it.
 - Overall, nearly one in five MSM participating in the study was infected (18 percent). While MSM of all races and ethnicities were severely affected, black MSM were particularly impacted.
 - Among those who were infected, one-third (34 percent) were unaware of their HIV status. Young MSM and MSM of color were least likely to know they were infected.
- AIDS continues to claim the lives of too many MSM. Since the beginning of the epidemic, more than 302,000 MSM with AIDS have died.

Complex Factors Increase Risk

- **High prevalence of HIV:** The existing high prevalence of HIV among gay and bisexual men means MSM face a greater risk of being exposed to infection with each sexual encounter, especially as they get older. For young black MSM, partnering with older black men (among whom HIV prevalence is high) may also lead to increased risk.
- **Lack of knowledge of HIV status:** Studies show that individuals who know they are infected take steps to protect their partners. Yet many MSM are unaware of their status and may unknowingly be transmitting the virus to others. Additionally, some MSM may make false assumptions or have inaccurate information about their partner's HIV status. It is critical to ensure that sexually active MSM get tested for HIV at least annually, or more frequently as needed.
- **Complacency about risk:** Among young MSM in particular, complacency about HIV may play a key role in HIV risk, since these men did not personally experience the severity of the early AIDS epidemic. Additional challenges for many MSM include maintaining consistently safe behaviors over time, underestimating personal risk, and the false belief that because of treatment advances, HIV is no longer a serious health threat. We must reach each generation of MSM and develop programs that can help MSM remain uninfected throughout the course of their lives.
- **Social discrimination and cultural issues:** For some MSM, social and economic factors, including homophobia, stigma, and lack of access to health care may increase risk behaviors or be a barrier to receiving HIV prevention services.
- **Substance abuse:** Some MSM use alcohol and illegal drugs, contributing to increased risk for HIV infection and other STDs. Substance use can increase the risk for HIV transmission through risky sexual behaviors while under the influence and through sharing needles or other injection equipment.

HIV: Protect Yourself

Be smart about HIV. Here's what you can do to reduce your risk of infection:

Get the facts — Arm yourself with basic information: Are you at risk? How is HIV spread? How can you protect yourself?

Take control — You have the facts; now protect yourself and your loved ones. There are three essential ways to reduce your risk:

1. Don't have sex (i.e., anal, vaginal or oral)
2. Only have sex (i.e., anal, vaginal or oral) if you're in a mutually monogamous relationship with a partner you know is not infected
3. Use a condom every time you have anal, vaginal or oral sex. (Correct and consistent use of the male latex condom is highly effective in reducing HIV transmission.)

Put yourself to the test — Knowing your HIV status is a critical step toward stopping HIV transmission, because if you know you are infected, you can take steps to protect

your partners. Also, if you are infected, the sooner you find out, the sooner you can receive life-extending treatment. In fact, CDC recommends that all adults and adolescents be tested for HIV. Because other STDs can play a role in the acquisition of HIV, knowing whether you are infected with either is critical in reducing your risk for infection.

Call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit www.hivtest.org to find HIV and STD testing locations near you.

Start talking — Talk to everyone you know about HIV — friends and family, coworkers and neighbors, at work and at places of worship. Have ongoing and open discussions with your partners about HIV testing and risk behaviors. Talking openly about HIV can reduce the stigma that keeps too many from seeking the testing, prevention and treatment services, and support they need.

HIV doesn't have to become part of your life. Each of us can and must be part of the solution.

Visit www.cdc.gov/actagainstaids for more information about HIV and what you can do to stop HIV.

If you are a member of the news media and need more information, please visit www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/Newsroom or contact the News Media Line at CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention (404-639-8895 or NCHHSTPMediaTeam@cdc.gov).